WORDEATER
ssue #112

Wordeater #112
Table of Contents

The Healer....2....Keith Gay
A Question of Faith....5....Jeremy Neander
Shoelaces....10....Jacob A. Boyd
Megan....13....Diana Weathersby
A Knife at the Door....16....Christina Sparks
Catch....19....Brent Haas
Every Corner of the Real Thing....23....Mike Hainzinger
The Expedition....27....Steve Wichelecki
Supplication....30....Sarah Vines
Elegy....31....Amber Lamb
Father of Home....32....Dane Mentzer
Grandma's Memory....33....Kristina Swaagman
Your vision is blurred....34....Sean Felix
Dutiful....35....Susan Slaviero
Certifiable....36....Kevin E. Orf
Look round the bend....37....Sara DePirro
A Saddened Child....37....Ryan B. Foster
Full Circle....38....Amy Outland
Lines....39....Zyndram Para
In the Face of Challenge....39....Linda Campbell
I gave, you took....40....Keith Gay
If I Ever Get the Chance....42....Jennifer Klingelhofer-Scholes
The Mirror....43....Shamill Darrell Smith
Painting the Sky....43....Rob Geiger
My Box....44....Pricilla Wells
My Old Friend....45....Ryan B. Foster
Unpopular....45....Kim Anderson
Fish....46....Allen Vires
Trees....46....Molly Chase
Black Ice....46....Rebecca Guerra
Coyote....46....Stephanie Dally
Wind....46....Stacy Buehler
Snow....47....Lindsey Stanton
Love....47....Ivan Bonkalski
River and Waterfalls....47....Servando Dorantes
Flowers....47....Servando Dorantes
Wolf....47....Eric Korczak
Shadows....47....Allen Vires

Cover Art: Paul Stephenson

Drama

The Healer

by Keith Gay

Setting: Hades. Two soldiers enter dressed in Greek armor, one with an arrow sticking out of his chest, the other with a short sword through his head.

Effluvious: So how much farther to this Chiron of yours?
Nicodermus: Right, Chiron.
Effluvious: You know, the healer.
Nicodermus: Right, the healer.
Effluvious: Right. So how much farther?
Nicodermus: Uh, not much farther. Shouldn't be long now.
Effluvious: Jesus, is this far.
Nicodermus: Who's Jesus?
Effluvious: Say, why couldn't this Chiron guy just come to us?
Nicodermus: Why would he? We're the ones that are wounded.
Effluvious: So what? He's the one with the horse.
Nicodermus: Chiron doesn't have a horse.
Effluvious: I thought you said he was a horse.
Nicodermus: He's not a horse. He's half horse. You know, a Centaur, half-horse half-man. He's king of the Centaurs.
Effluvious: Well, couldn't he ride himself then?
Nicodermus: No he couldn't.
Effluvious: Well why not?
Nicodermus: Because. He's wounded.
Effluvious: Well so are we. Besides, why doesn't he just heal himself?
Nicodermus: He can't.
Effluvious: Why not? Doesn't sound like much of a healer if he can't even heal himself.
Nicodermus: Because he can't. He's the Wounded Healer who can heal others but must forever suffer himself. That's his "thing".
Effluvious: That's just great. We're walking all this way to see a healer who can't even heal himself.
Nicodermus: He's supposed to be the best.
Effluvious: Really?
Nicodermus: That's what they say.
Effluvious: Well, what's wrong with him?
Nicodermus: Arrow.
Effluvious: Oh that's just wonderful. What kind of healer gets shot with an arrow?
Nicodermus: He didn't get shot. He got nicked.

Effluvious: Nicked? You've got to be kidding me. I nicked myself shaving this morning and even I had myself healed by breakfast. Speaking of breakfast, boy am I hungry. This is some walk.
Nicodermus: Here, eat this. (Picks piece of fruit off ground and hands it to Effluvious)
Effluvious: (takes fruit and bites it) This is good, what is it?
Nicodermus: Pomegranate. Look, there he is.
Effluvious: I thought you said he was a censor?
Nicodermus: Centaur. And he is.
Effluvious: Well, he don't look like no king of the horse-heads to me. Looks to me like an old man in a boat. Don't look like no healer either. In fact, if I didn't know better I'd say he's waiting to usher our souls across that river.
Nicodermus: He's a healer, trust me. And the best. He's never lost a patient.
Effluvious: I thought you said he's half horse?
Nicodermus: He is.
Effluvious: Well, which half?
Nicodermus: He's, er, horse at heart.
Effluvious: He's what?
Nicodermus: He's horse at heart. You know, man on the outside, horse on the inside. Don't you know what a Centaur is?
Effluvious: Uh, yeah, of course.
Nicodermus: Now look, don't say anything about the half horse, half man thing. Most of these Centaurs are rather sensitive about it.
Effluvious: They are?
Nicodermus Of course, wouldn't you be?
Effluvious: Uh, yeah, I guess so.
Nicodermus: And don't say anything about healing. Wait until he brings it up.
Effluvious: Listen, don't worry about me. I had an uncle who was horse at heart. Hey, Chiron, how's it going? Jesus, you sure picked a helluva place to open a practice.
Charon: Who's Jesus?
Effluvious: Hey look, a dog.
(Cerberus, the dog with three heads, runs up and starts sniffing all three men's crotches at the same time)
Effluvious: Friendly fellow aint he?
Charon: That is no "fellow". That is Cerberus, guardian of Underworld, and servant of the infernal Hecate.
Effluvious: What's he doing?
Charon: Checking your scent to make sure you belong here.
Effluvious: Cute pup. I'm gonna call you Spot, you Rex, and you Fido.
Nicodermus: Yeah, right. Here's our coins, Charon. Two for one-way. (hands Charon coins)
Effluvious: (bites fruit) Say, what did you say this was called again.

Charon: That is the pomegranate, the bitter fruit of the dead. Once you've tasted it's sour juices your soul is forever altered, doomed to suffer the cold dark torment of oblivion for all eternity.
Effluvious: It's kinda seedy. (Throws fruit to Cerberus. The three heads fight over it for a while, then Cerberus tumbles off in a heap, one head chewing the fruit, one chasing his tale, and the other licking his testicles) Bye Spoxido! Dogs are great.
Nicodermus: We should be going. (Soldier1 and 2 get in boat. Charon starts to row, singing "Mr. Roboto" quietly to himself as he rows.)
Effluvious:(to Nicodermus) You were right, he is pretty wounded.
Nicodermus: Told you.
Effluvious: Definitely horse at heart, too. Say, who's that.
Charon: That is Persephone, daughter of the Goddess Demeter, mistress of the dead, wife of the mighty Hades, doomed to spend three months of every year until the end of time in the black abyss for having eaten the bitter fruit you yourself have yet but tasted.
Effluvious: She's hot.
Nicodermus: No she's not. She's cold. She's very, very cold.
Effluvious: Who's that?
Charon: That is Tantalus, condemned to hang for an eternity upside down from a tree above the River Styx, unable to drink the leaden water or taste the putrid fruit, tortured by hunger and thirst forever.
Effluvious: For how long?
Nicodermus and Charon (together): Forever.
Effluvious: What for?
Charon: For the crime of feeding his own son-
Nicodermus: Er, that's the cure.
Effluvious: Is he getting better?
Nicodermus: Yes, much better. We'll all be better soon enough.

A Question Of Faith

by Jeremy Neander

Scene: Church, Main Room — Standing at the podium at the front of the room is Pastor Dean, a nearly middle-aged man draped in white robes and embossed scarf. He holds a thick, black Bible in his left hand with his right placed on the front cover. The book contrasts his bright white garb. A young teenager, Alex, sits alone on a pew near the corner in the back.

Pastor: Go in peace… Serve the Lord!

The Pastor finishes his sermon, and, taking his hand off the Bible, grasps his other wrist, seemingly closing himself off from the townspeople. The congregation stands and dismisses itself. The entire mass trudges out the back into the hall to the parking lot, except Alex, who approaches the tall, even-toned Pastor.

Alex: Pastor?
Pastor: What can I do for you, Alex?
Alex: I need to ask you something.
Pastor: Go ahead.
Alex looks down to the floor before raising his eyes back to the Pastor's, intently.
Alex: What's the reason for church?
The Pastor thinks briefly, organizing his thoughts.
Pastor: It's a gathering… *(Holding up the Bible in aid)* It's a place where people can come to share their beliefs and receive guidance from the Bible.
Alex: What about those that don't come to church?
The Pastor tightens his grip on the Bible, now down and out of the discussion.
Pastor: There are those that don't attend. Some still relate with the lord on their own time. They find it more fulfilling to practice freely, whenever they feel the need.
Alex: Is that what you do?… Seeing as how church isn't quite the same for you?
Pastor: In a sense… I have my time, and I have the church's time. But, I bring my beliefs with wherever I go.
Alex: What would you say it means to believe?
Pastor: To believe… in God?
Alex: Yeah.
The Pastor takes a deep breath, bordering hesitation. He grips the Bible tightly with both hands, near his chest.
Pastor: Well… To believe it is to have a strong feeling about it… the feeling that God is in your life and is always watching over you.
Alex: What if you don't have that feeling?…
The Pastor is leery to the direction that the conversation is taking.

Pastor: If you don't have that feeling, then… perhaps you don't believe.
Alex: Would you feel that way if you didn't believe?

Pastor: One could… Might I ask, why so interested in these types of questions?
Alex catches mild confusion, with some alertness in the Pastor's eyes.
Alex: I like to keep an open mind.
The Pastor's face displays intrigue to this response, but he is unsettled by the next.
Alex: What do you believe?
The Pastor is ruffled by the question. He moves about the platform, trying to hide his reaction. His hands, harshly grasping the edges, flex the Bible's binding.
Alex: Dean?
Pastor: You should know the answer to that.
The Pastor nearly turns completely away, but stops himself, unmoving.
Alex: You don't believe, do you…
Pastor: I do…
Alex: Why all the hesitation?
The Pastor hesitates again.
Alex: What is it you're not telling me?
Pastor: When you walked up here, what were your intentions?
Alex: I had some questions.
Pastor: I don't think you did. You're a smart kid, Alex. You may very well know as much as I do. … What did you come here to find out?
Alex: The truth… from you…
Pastor: The truth?…
Alex nods. The Pastor's stance wavers a bit as he steps back. He lowers his gaze. His right hand releases the Bible to his left, and both hands drop to his sides.
Pastor: Have you ever heard of Baudelaire?
Alex: No.
The Pastor looks away, seemingly scanning the empty pews.
Pastor: He was a French author. He once wrote that the greatest trick the devil ever pulled was convincing the world he didn't exist. … Now, I don't think that's true. … I believe the greatest trick the devil ever pulled was convincing the world that God existed.
Alex is dumbstruck, contemplating the thought in his head.
Pastor: I can't see how we can live in a world with a God that never acts, or shows himself. … Though, I do see an evil. I see the work of the devil. But there is no heaven. There is no holy ghost. It's all between here and hell. … Now, maybe I'm wrong, but that's what I believe.
Alex: You really believe that?
Pastor: I have my doubts, but they are few and far between.
The Pastor sits down on the edge of the platform. He sets the Bible down beside him.
Alex: Why are you here?
Pastor: Why am I here?
Alex: How can you teach from the Bible when you don't believe it yourself?
Pastor: Does it matter?

Alex: It does.
Alex approaches the Pastor, slowing as he walks by his side.
Alex: What would people think if they knew what you believed?
Pastor:They'd leave. Because of me, they'd leave. Don't you think I know that?

Alex: Doesn't that scare you?
The Pastor closes his eyes momentarily, reopening them as he speaks.
Pastor:Only on their behalf…
Alex: What do you mean?
Pastor:Nothing…
Alex walks around to the Pastor's front again.
Alex: What are you hiding? … Why are you hiding?
Pastor:*(Standing, Bible in his right hand)* You should go home.
Alex: Why do you preach what you don't believe?
The Pastor steps back onto the platform, moving to the podium.
Pastor:I don't want to hurt anybody.
Alex: Has that ever happened?
The Pastor has his left hand on the podium, the other at his side. He looks briefly at Alex, weary, before turning his eyes back to the top of the stand.
Pastor:Once…
The Pastor pauses again, then looks to Alex, who is expecting more to the answer.
Pastor:Her name was Heather. She came to the church when I was a seminary student. *(Pausing, almost reminiscent)* We were in love from the start.
The Pastor holds up the Bible, observing the binding, uninterested.
Pastor:But things changed. I told her the truth. …and she left. I didn't know just how she felt, until she stopped coming to services. I knew after that. *(Saddened, regretful)* She hated me. She left the church and never came back… …because of me.
The Pastor looks at Alex, his eyes showing both grief and hope.
Pastor:I've never spoken about what I believe, and nobody's ever questioned my faith in the church. … *(In wonder)* I don't know why I told you… …but I'm glad you asked.
The Pastor lowers his eyes once more.
Alex: Do you think she remembers you?
Pastor:I couldn't say… Wherever she is, I hope she's at ease.
They are both quiet. Alex looks about for a handle on the moment. The Pastor smiles slightly to himself, remembering.
Alex: Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted.
The Pastor looks back at Alex, who stands tall like a proud friend. The Pastor's expression brightens with the fulfillment he has just received.

Pastor: Better is a poor and a wise child than an old and foolish king, who will no more be admonished.

A moment of silence.

Alex: My mother never hated you.

The Pastor is shocked, his face adorn with utter bewilderment.

Alex: You had a difference in beliefs, but she never hated you.

Alex turns around, walking down the aisle to the back. The Pastor is speechless.

Alex: *(Shouting back)* And be ye kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you.

Alex exits. The Pastor, recovering, melts his rigidity and relaxes. He loosens his grip on the Bible, revealing a dissipating glow of moisture in the outline of a hand across the cover. He glances at it, then takes his sleeve and wipes the dampness away.

End Scene.

Short Fiction

Shoelaces

by Jacob A. Boyd

A boy and a girl met for the first time while participating in a total immersion Russian language course that lasted for three months at M.V.Lomonosov University in Moscow during the winter of 1968.

Neither of the two was originally from Russia nor spoke Russian prior to arriving at the course. They had an interest in it they had grafted from photo books and movies, which was then motivated by the stirring politics of the times; they had never been to Russia before. It all was new to them. The boy was Polish, the girl French, and the enormous new country they found themselves in frightened them. The boy did not speak French and the girl did not speak Polish. Neither was able to assuage the other's fears with familiar maxims or, for that matter, a kind word in their respective languages. But, in the learning of the third language, Russian, they learned not to be afraid.

They two became lovers and laughed through muddled conversations to make the other understand that it didn't matter, that it was they who communicated, Russian was incidental. They made love and laughed. They went for walks, and drank in pubs, and window-shopped, and toured statues, and watched shows, and got lost on trains, and laughed. Three months passes in this way and they returned home, expedited by the events of that spring, writing letter to each other in what untidy Russian the had bothered to learn during their time together.

Filtered through a censoring bureau, as many exchanges between Russian learned intelligentsia were at that time, the letters they wrote reached each other with thick, black lines drawn over selected words, sentences, and sometimes, whole sections. Nevertheless, this did not make their letters any less understood; the voids left mid-sentence or even entire paragraphs contained only that which was implicit, that they loved each other. They laughed when they saw the censor's marks, thinking that perhaps their love was considered code. But because of this bothersome censoring, their incoming letters piled up on each of their desks, the process of correctly deciphering the other's expressions invariably being slower than the process of expressing one's self. And now that they were separated, not only by distance, but also by the invisible lines of party affiliations, they felt a need to tell each other all about the goings on of their lives, to draw their own lines of affiliation, form an unbreechable border of love around each other.

They wrote tomes. They had time to do so, and knowing that all they had to do was wait out the troubles and they'd be able to meet again, they armed themselves with paper and pen, some change for a stamp and envelope in order to make that time pass. There was so much to get out that they hadn't gotten out while together; they had been too distracted by each other's presence. The other's letters simply had to wait as they wrote.

Questions posed in one letter went unanswered for three or four return letters, which, themselves, were spaced out over weeks. Arrangements proposed in another letter were past time to go off once they were responded to. At times, questions and arrangements and exclamations were never responded to at all. But, this did not dull their ardor and they continued in this way for months.

One day, the boy contracted paresis, a condition that ate away at the forepart of his brain. The first symptoms, walking into a room and forgetting why, believing that he'd only receive as

much mail as he sent out, were innocuous enough, then, after maybe weeks, a symptom alerted him that he needed a doctor, he forgot the sound of the mailman's ring. The diagnosis given to him promised that the condition would slowly and irreparable erase his reasoning and his memory over the next several months. He realized this meant that sooner or later we would forget his reasons for loving the French girl, they would break down into their simplest components and then into nothing. His love had a half-life.

He hastily wrote to her telling her that he no longer could go on like this, exchanging letter and supplications of love across such an unfordable river as language, that the had found a Polish wife and was marrying within the year, it was what was right considering the times and to please stop sending letters. It was all a lie. He couldn't bring himself to tell her that he was simply going to forget her, that she'd disappear piecemeal and leave in his memory a void the confusing shape of a girl.

He loved her; and laid in bed for weeks, watching the news as her letters arrived, the ones she wrote before reading those stacked up on desk. He imagined her writing out her days to him, laboring in Russian, trying to make it clear, while the entire time at the bottom of the stack of his letters. Just beside her, his letter waited, negating it all. He could see her, her fingertips red and blunted from the pressure, as she wrote all the more furiously to discover fully why his letters had stopped after having read through the entire stack, blaming her pocket translation dictionary for not having the right words that would evade the censors, then finally herself.

He waited until her letters stopped arriving, even longer, just to make sure, reading all but her last, packaged them into a shoebox and went home to his parents.

Eating and drinking were difficult for the boy and his parents were less tense when he could keep a meal down. They didn't understand why he was vomiting and so restless; those weren't the normal symptoms the doctor had told them, but they weren't to be discounted. His parents attributed these symptoms to his letting it go on so long without attending to it, without coming home to the familiar. They looked back doubly saddened that he had shown up on their step after so long carrying only a suitcase and a shoebox he had yet to open that was tied with the shoelaces from the very shoes he was wearing. He had obviously been severely lamed before he arrived. The display had been too pathetic for them to doubt that.

Time went by and they were extra careful with him; he became the center of a small, very important universe. He began to keep full meals down, one a day, then progressing until it wasn't an issue. He began to sleep at night and at times even pointed at the television with recognition as he and his parents watched the news, at the tanks passing over a bridge, a statue maybe. His parents were overjoyed.

This entire time he had not mentioned the French girl; it hurt too much for him to think to bring the idea of her to words and the longer he didn't mention her, the more the pain dulled to static, the more the words that could be used to express her blurred at the edges.

The boy came into the kitchen one day with laces in his shoes. Until then, he had been clomping around the house in shoes without any. His parents took this as a good sign and asked what was in the shoebox. He didn't know what they were talking about; he'd needed laces and he found some; what had that to do with a shoebox, he didn't know. They reminded him of the shoebox he had brought with him that he had yet to open. He had nearly forgotten about it and as he pulled it out from under his bed he wondered why he had not taken more notice of it when he unraveled his laces from it. Inside he found dozens of letters, all addressed by the same girl to him and written in Russian. One was unopened and he set it aside. A familiar pang of unease faded as he let go of that envelope.

His parents stood hopeful, glad of their son's step toward retention, They held each other's hands and watched him pick one then another at random. He read a few lines from each. He didn't speak as he did so, his brow a knit of concentration. He spent a few minutes on each letter, but was able to decipher only the most rudimentary parts, and those only by referencing a Russian translation dictionary he also found in the box. Regardless, the censored sections eluded him completely. They asked what the letters were. He read a few more lines, looked at the unopened letter beside him, and didn't understand why a French girl would write to tell all about her days in unkempt Russia amid the overreaching turmoil of the times.

He threw the unopened letter away.

"Nothing." He replied, "just some silly French girl who wanted to practice her Russian, a pen pal. I used to write Russian fluently."

His parents smiled.

Megan

by Diana Weathersby

I received the first phone call the afternoon of October 12, 1996. Once again, I was asked to help out. They played with my emotions. They knew I wouldn't refuse when it came to children. I couldn't refuse. By the end of the phone call hot tears were streaming down my face. The woman at the other end, an acquaintance from many years ago, pleaded with me to take her fifteen year old son in, for just a short while. Just until she got on her feet. You see, she was being evicted and had no money, no job and custody of four of seven children. If the boy was gone, she would find it easier to stay with friends, until she got on her feet.

As I later found out, the state of Wisconsin, once known for it's leniency in providing aid to needy families, was "cracking' down, no pun intended. The mother was very upset that after repeated requests for her to attend drug and alcohol counseling, as a condition of her continuing aid, the funds were finally cut off when she did not show up. "They can't tell me what to do!" she said. Apparently, they could.

I was filled with the usual sob story of the poor boy who only wanted a chance to play high school football. "He really is a good kid," said the Mom. "He gets straight A's and earns money to help out his mom and sisters by mowing lawns." "Sure, no problem," I replied. "I'll be there Saturday to pick him up," I assured the mother. I told her I understood that it was only for a short time, until she got on her feet. I tried to not let her notice my disgust over the phone for her. I only cared to help the boy. She could rot in hell.

My mind raced. What have I done? Is this the right thing for my family? I have an eight year old boy at home. Would he pick up bad habits? Would he be exposed to drugs? One again I reacted from my heart and not my head. If it didn't work out it would only be for a short time I kept telling myself.

The drive to Green Bay, Wisconsin was so much longer than I expected. Almost five hours of thinking, wondering, doubting and fearing. The directions were easy enough, but had I got lost I would have just asked how to get to the armpit of Green Bay. Although it was exactly what I expected, it still shocked me and further justified that I was doing the right thing.

A small white shack with a detached garage filled to the ceiling things now abandoned. Dressers and mattresses randomly set in the front yard like they belonged there, broken bikes and garbage strewn about greeted me. I hesitantly walked to the front door and knocked on the screen door with no screen. The mother came to the door with her usual attachments, a cigarette and a can of beer. "I hardly knew it was you!" she slurred. "How long has it been?" she attempted small talk. "Fifteen years," I quickly replied, trying not to show everything I was feeling at that moment on my face. The small front room was filled with the thick haze of cigarette smoke. My head immediately began pounding. A tattered couch full of burn holes, a similar chair and a small black and white television blaring the football game for the enjoyment of two additional guests. A case of beer set within arms reach of the three who apparently weren't going to let an impending eviction dampen their festive moods.

"Hey," one man mumbled, "Sure is nice of you to help out." "No problem," I stuttered, clearly feeling outnumbered.

The boy appeared in the doorway. We exchanged pleasantries and he nervously began to gather his things. He was so obviously worried about his mother and sisters, but on the other hand, he

was tired of being the only "parent" and anxious to see what life would be like elsewhere, if only for a short time. The mother seemed uncomfortable at my being there. Irritated, she paced and smoked trying to explain how things got so bad. It didn't matter what she said, things were just as bad fifteen years ago. She just had four more children since then. She tried to explain that since her brother had committed suicide one month earlier, she hadn't been able to pull herself together. I agreed it was tragic. Her brother had fought alcoholism for most of his thirty-eight years and eventually stopped fighting. He was going to the store to get milk and a pack of cigarettes. Instead, he bought a garden hose, jammed it into the tailpipe of the car, rolled up the window using duct tape to seal off his tomb and slowly died. His name was John. The younger bother who had moved in with his older sister, just until he got on his feet.

Quietly, like a shadow, a mere skeleton of a girl appeared next to me. Her huge almond eyes stared at me fearless. She was sued to strangers. I knelt down, struggling to control my emotions. I knew the mother had a little girl, but I didn't know how old. What I did know though, was that I had come to Green Bay, Wisconsin for this little girl. I just did not want to admit it. "Hi, Sweetheart," I said. "What is your name?" She stared at me intently. "You have green eyes," she quietly whispered. Her name was Megan.

Megan's appearance startled me. At five years old she weighed only twenty-six pounds. Her complexion was a ghostly gray and her eyes were way too large for her thin face. Her clothes were filthy and mismatched, her baby teeth full of cavities and she wheezed with each breath. I knew I had to take Megan from her mother. Green Bay winters were cold and the mother had hinted at the family living in the car until a friend's place became available. Megan might not make it; she seemed so frail.

I had to think fast. It was getting dark and I still had to get to the high school to get the boy's transcripts. Carefully, I posed the question to the mother, "Would you like me to take Megan with her brother for a little while, until you can get on your feet?" I could see a flash of pain in the mother's eyes. One of the men on the couch quickly interjected that it would be best for Megan to let her go too. I wasn't sure if he really had thought this through, or was it easier to party with less kids around. I was careful not to push. If the mother suspected my feelings were too strong, she would refuse out of sheer spite. I told her I was going to take the boy to the school and that I would give her time to think it over.

The boy and I drove to the school. I wasn't surprised what I learned once we arrived. I had expected it. The transcripts showed D's and F's, not straight A's. There were truancy and behavior issues and he was going to be held back. The room began to spin and my head pounded incessantly. Oh God, what do I do? If I don't take the boy, I'll never get Megan out of there. We gathered his personal belongings from his locker and quickly left the school. The principal just stared at me and shook his head. He was hardened to it. I wasn't yet. On the way back to the little white house, I asked about the lawn mower. "Oh yeah," he said. "Mom sold that for beer money; I never got to mow any lawns."

We pulled into the driveway. I had to get Megan and get out of there. It was getting dark and my nerves were on file. As I walked into the front room, the mother appeared with a folded piece of paper in her hands. It was a photocopy of all the children's social security cards. "You'll need this to get Megan in school," she said. It never ceases to amaze me that regardless of the turmoil people like her live in they are able to produce all the documentation needed for state aid, welfare, medical cards and to let someone else register their child for school. I was grateful. This was a yes. Somehow I had to get her permission for me to have Megan in writing. I casually mentioned that I would probably need

some kind of authorization to take care of Megan, you know, in case of a medical emergency. I scribbled a note and quickly gave her a pen to sign it.

The mother picked up Megan and tried to explain that she was going away for a little while with her brother. Megan began to cry. She didn't cling to her mother; it was just a sad accepting cry. Things were changing again. Megan was scared, but she had been scared many times before. It was just another sad chapter in an already too sad life and she was getting used to it. Megan walked to the old lady who lived next door, the one that gave her cookies sometimes, and told her that she was going away. She hugged that old lady with mote emotion than she had hugged her own mother. Children know. There was no packing of clothes, there were no toys. A ratty patchwork quilt and a "breathing machine" as Megan called it were her only belongings to take. I tucked her into the backseat.

Megan's two older sisters came walking from upon the street. I knew I couldn't do anymore. I tried to harden myself. Megan cried softly in the backseat. I told her I would take a picture of her family so she could remember them. I snapped the picture, handed the mother a $100 dollar bill and left. I rationalized that the money could be used for food and shelter for the girls, but I knew better. An hour down the road my cell phone rang. My husband quietly asked, "How many children do you have in the car?" He knew, like I knew, that Megan was with me.

A Knife at the Door
by Christine Sparks

My empty stomach dropped when the phone rang at six o'clock in the morning. I had just instructed my staff at the day care center during the last staff meeting, that if they were calling in, they should call the center and leave a message with Sharon, who would call me in case of an emergency. That way I avoided constant call ins to my house at all hours of the night. Before I even answered the phone I was a little nervous wondering what the emergency would be. Nothing prepared me for, "Christine, the center has been robbed and whoever robbed it, left a butcher knife at the back door." The butterflies fluttering in my stomach dived bombed me and then tried escaping out of my mouth. "I'll be there as fast as I can." I quickly said and hung up while yelling at my husband to drop the kids off at my mother's since the center had just been robbed and no way was I bringing them with me.

The forty-minute ride to the center, which was normally slow anyway, was much worse than usual. The taillights of every car seemed to be cautioning me not to rush to a sight I probably did not want to see anyway. As the car putted along the widening highway, suddenly I remembered the night before when I had closed the center.

The last families of the night classes full of boys far away from young children who needed noses wiped and diapers changed. I was forever slow gathering my children's belongings, so I let them go. Michele, the director down the street called and we started venting about the stresses of running a childcare center. As we talked she interrupted, "Who is that laughing in the background?" I stood completely still as a shiver ran up the length of my back, my neck and then stopped at the tip of my head. I heard nothing but my six month old snoring in the car seat and the tapping of crayon markings on paper that my three-year-old daughter was coloring. "I didn't ear a sound." I said nervously and then told her I would call her later that night since I was freaking out.

The muscles around my heart painfully squeezed out every breath I took as I grabbed the handle of my son's carrier and my daughter's small hand. Usually I checked each classroom, but there was no way I was going back there by myself, alone and unprotected. The short hallway to the front door was the length of a football field. The faster I walked the longer the carpet became as I tried to quickly grab the door to get out and lock it behind me. I started to think about the rumor that our center was home to a child ghost. This ghost was a memory of a child left long ago when the center first opened some thirty years ago. Strange phenomenon were known for happening when anyone was alone at the center; toys played their own, the pitter-patter of footsteps have been said to occur and the shrill belly laughter of a child being caught misbehaving had been heard many a time. Could that explain the laughter Michele had heard? Innocent child spirits would have no knowledge between a practical joke and an evil twist of play. I was not going to find out what mood it was in. It is funny to think how nonbelievers during the day could quickly be converted to believers at night. Down the dimly lit sidewalk, I quickly went. The dark shadows of the dumpster waved out a little further as to beckon me on. The yellow moon was round and full. My heartbeats, kept time to the quick puffs of cold air that left my mouth and melted into the night air. I finally had the slow, sleepy-eyed children in the car, as I turned out of the desolate parking lot watching the trash swirl low on the ground looking for a place to settle. Driving past the center I could not even

look at the shaded windows for fear that someone would be looking back at me, smiling. Twenty fast paced minutes into my trip back home; the harrowing experience was long forgotten as hungry children whined for snacks and bottles. And now, the next day, twenty minutes into my trip back to the center, the memories of the night before loomed large in my mind. I was greeted at the parking lot by bright red flashing lights and neon yellow tape. The large heads on the school bus bobbing up and down between the seats definitely did not belong to my school age children. I took a deep breath before getting out of my car and went up the dirt-lined walk. I peered into my bus where I saw innocent children's school papers twirling in the breeze of the open door between police officer's feet. Seems that the bus had also been broken into, no wonder it looked so sad.

Had I not been so upset by the whole situation, what greeted me upon opening the center doors would have been a sight. Straight down the hall, my four year old classroom, which normally was alive with the sound of children ready to learn and play was oddly silent as if its mouth had been forced shut with the bright yellow tape stamped, CRIME SCENE, that adorned its door. To my left, parents dropped off their children completely ignoring the presence of serious, blue-clothed police officers in white, clean gloves holding clear plastic bags. Some of them even tried to drop off their children in the crime scene classroom. Sharon, introduced me to the head detective, white bearded and big bellied, who politely explained that I would have to write down everything that was missing as he filled out his paperwork. We then walked into the four year old room and those butterflies returned once again. My mouth hung opened as I looked at the back door. There, on the floor, was a knife. A long one, a shiny one, one that could hurt and one that did not belong to our kitchen. Finger print dust dance in the warm sun light coming from the windows, deciding whether it should fall on the cold, hard steel of the blade. Computer parts sat there on the floor, violated and alone, missing their main components. Their friends, the radios, were gone-kidnapped. Downtrodden toys lay scattered, cold, on the floor. We walked into the next classroom when the computers were in the same listless condition. Lifelines had been cut and buttons broken. In a matter of a night they had gone from being our humming, smart machines able to give a young child a head start into this technological community to pieces of junk, useless and destroyed. The third and final classroom proved the most clues. An old window had been pried open, wood splintered around the edges and the screen had been cut. "Do you see," said the officer with no-nonsense eyes, "the window was pried open from the inside." "Whoever did this," he paused with great concern, "did not break in, they broke out." I could do nothing but stare back at him, pale-faced and fallen shoulders, in disbelief. "Who would do this," I thought to myself.

Completely unnerved I walked to my office that surprisingly had not been touched. No money stolen. Even the cookie jar had been left with its wealth of nickels and quarters. I was told to have the cleaning man go in for questioning at the police station. When I called James he said he had been there between eleven p.m. and three a.m. and all was well. James was a parent of the center, had children that attended there and would have no reason to commit such a crime. It made no sense.

Then I remembered the laughing Michele had heard of the previous night. Had an intruder or many intruders been in the center as I closed for the night? Had I been there alone, a dedicated employee, with my innocent babies, while a planned intruder sat poised with a knife? Was my fear of a child ghost what saved me from what could have been a bad situation? Were they there when Sharon opened the doors and then got scared and left? My best employee had been vulnerable in the cold, dark, early morning hours. My mind whirled with questions, the prickles on my neck never left the day. The center, a safe haven for children of all shapes and sizes was no longer safe. It had been violated. I had been violated. Nothing would be the same. We never found out who destroyed our

computers and other various toys and belongings. We never were able to replace the lost as the cost was not high enough for the insurance company to reimburse. From that day on, every parent was a suspect in my eyes, every stranger-guilty. I had four people opening the center in the morning and four closing. I never stayed alone again and eventually I left that center as the feelings of uneasiness continued to plague me day after day. The center had sucked out the hope and trust out of me and replaced it with fear and anger in my sole. It was eating me alive and for the sake of myself and my children, we quit to find a place away from the greed, destruction and misery that strangled the day care center and its employees with every passing day that the culprits were still free.

Catch

by Brent Haas

He had been drifting for weeks, battered by an inconsolable yesterday and an unimaginable tomorrow. So, today, instead of the usual cab ride back to the cheap motel, he found himself walking—an empty gesture to a life poured out by a merciless God, an unfaithful friend discarded. At the mid-point of this hour's journey, the road turned sharply and began to squeeze itself between crowded tenements and disheveled shops, a half-deserted street, his muttering retreat. The man paused, took in the scent of a rotting neighborhood, the taste of dead air. He flipped his coat over a slumped shoulder, loosened his tie. There was comfort here. He could hide here, tucked nicely in some niche of a room, away from home and wife and unbearable memories, a solitary ghost of tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow.

He sighted the boy a half-block away, haphazardly tossing a ball against the gray exterior of a decaying apartment building. As he approached, the boy paused to glimpse at him, wiped his forehead with a tattered sleeve, and, at the last possible moment before the man could pass him by, whispered, "Hi, mister."

The first miracle was that he slowed his pace and turned to face a motley lad with tangled hair pouring out from under a dirty Yankee baseball cap. "Hello, boy. Hot day."

"Not for playing ball."

The man almost smiled. His son would have been nine. Had just started throwing hard enough for the man to really enjoy their daily routine, a joyful ritual that usually ended in keep-away from his wife who threatened to hide the ball if they didn't come in for dinner before it got cold. But he didn't smile—this was not his son, and his wife would never again laugh and jump between them, and he wanted desperately to kill those memories. "No, not for playing ball," he said as he returned to his walk.

"Want to catch some?" It was a plea, not in words but in voice quickened and anxious. It was the hopeful plea of one unnoticed, abandoned to this empty lot. And it meshed with the faint begging of another voice, a haunting whisper to throw harder I'm not a girl you know come on dad when are we going to a game you promised you'd take mom and me and the Mets are here Saturday you said you'd take us throw me a high one dad. "Just a few minutes, mister, OK?"

The dead voice echoed just a little longer, dad, ok.? John wiped his eyes and swung around to face the boy. Then, discarding the coat, he rolled his sleeves and gestured for the ball. The boy whipped it to him with a grin.

They played for some time, silently throwing back and forth, focusing always on the catch. Once the boy threw wildly, sending the ball fleeing down the narrow street. The man turned to retrieve it, but the boy had already taken off in chase. Standing there, he wondered if this was everyday for the lad—a chance meeting, a few minutes of catch, then wait again. Above them, the sun pushed down its oppressive heat, a summer sun ironic in its bleak prophecy of forever to a boy of thirteen, to a man of thirty-three.

"Sorry." The boy handed him the ball and glared at the offending sun. The man understood the need for this excuse, for any excuse. He nodded, rubbed the ball between his hands to rid it of the cinders of its flight, and carefully tossed it back to the boy.

When he was ready to leave, he draped his coat over his shoulder, smiled. "Well, boy, you've worn me out."

"Want to play tomorrow?" The anxious question was directed more at the ground than at the man.

The man too glanced down, sensing tomorrow's Saturday can we go tomorrow dad the dodgers are playing. His answer came not as a promise but as a possibility—"We'll see."

The boy watched him disappear two blocks down, then rifled the ball high into the air. It returned, floating above him, gathered speed and landed just beyond his outstretched hands.

He had been banging the ball against the building for two days. Today, he was the defender of his home, flinging stones at circling wolves. Chips of brick sprinkled the foundation from the constant pounding. He peeked sideways down the street every third or fourth throw. The man did not come. The boy stretched out on the weeded lot and counted cars that scurried past—it wasn't difficult, for this was a neighborhood that tempted few. Later, he jumped the sidewalk and back again, careful not to touch any cracks, a soldier in a minefield. He worried. He had said something wrong, he knew that. He wanted to apologize. He searched again. It was another eternal summer day.

The man heard the sharp thump, thump before he ever saw the lad. He rounded the corner in old clothes, tennis shoes. And carrying two new baseball gloves. He waved from the distance. The youth ran to meet him. He wanted to ask about yesterday, but the shiny glove muted his question. The glove was enough.

They played ball. And talked. "I live over there," the boy confided as he agilely scooped up a lazy grounder.

The man looked past him momentarily, to the row of dingy apartments that crowded the street, buildings not looked after by landlord or tenant. A rumpled man spit out of his window. A woman below bellowed. He spit again.

"My mom works at the laundry. That's our church down at the corner." The boy lunged to his left to pull in a liner softly thrown. "See that dog?" he asked, spotting a mangy mutt hesitating at the edge of the lot. "He's dangerous." He punched his fist into the stiff mitt, creating a deeper pocket.

"How long have you lived here?"

"All my life." The boy held the ball to look at the man. "Do you live around here?"

The man was not prepared for the question, certainly not prepared for its implications. In the near distance a dog barked, its echo drifting down the enclosed street. He used that distraction in grateful relief. "What kind of a dog is it?"

"Oh, I don't know. A mixed breed, I guess. He's really dumb. Knocks over garbage cans. He'll eat anything." The boy lobbed the ball on a slow arc. "I used to play with him."

"Why did you stop?"

"He bit me. So I kicked him. Now he doesn't come around."

This time the man held the ball, walking over to sit on the curb. The boy settled beside him. "Why did he bite you?"

"I was teasing him. I had a sandwich Mom made and I held out a chunk of it for him. When he reached for it, I pulled it away."

"Why?"

"Funning, you know. He kept jumping for that food and missing. He looked so stupid. It was just a game. Anyway, he finally laid down, panting, just staring at me. I started to walk away and

suddenly he charged. Took a bite out of my calf. Hurt like hell, so I kicked him hard. I've seen him a couple times but he doesn't come up to me anymore."

"I guess he don't like to be teased."

"It doesn't matter anyway."

"Why not?"

"He's just a dog."

The man winced. He had used that logic himself—a handy excuse to mask his pain—had pushed away a loving wife and friends who were sympathetic or worried or needed his company. Yet to him, it did matter—more with each day—immensely more.

The boy, already back to throwing distance, pointed for a high fly.

"Try this one," the man said with a playful grin. And with that he flipped the ball over the boy's shoulder, just beyond his reach.

"Ah, you made me miss on purpose."

"Just teasing."

They spent the next two weeks chasing balls almost every afternoon. And the man would buy the boy ice cream sometimes. And sometimes they would see who could throw the ball higher. And always they talked. Of flying kites and friendship, of next week, next year, of swimming, of God, of love. And on those rare days when he did not come, the boy counted cars and jumped sidewalks and waited. He always came back.

And on the last day, they had been playing for maybe an hour. The boy talked of his mother and the Yankees, and of a job he had gotten to clean up the empty lot and if he did it good he could get other jobs.

And he talked about how he had brought the stray dog some food and made up with him.

The man had been scanning the run-down buildings that seemed so familiar now. "Do you think that's important?'

"Got to get right with your friends."

The man froze. Timmy flooded his mind—Timmy, five, his son, flush with anger at a playmate who had pushed him down, wanting a father's comfort, listening to a father's words—"*Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold.*" Such a stunningly simple truth, long forgotten. Getting right with your friends needed only action, immediate action. Laughing, the man hurled the ball straight up, observed it climb skyward then pause, translucent against the blue. Life flashed—a montage of bright tomorrows burned into his consciousness—and the ball drifted back to him, bigger than he had imagined, huge, oval—perfect. It nestled in his hands just before the boy crashed into him, glove extended.

"Hey, that was mine!"

"Nope," the man whispered, "that one was mine." Smiling, he flipped the ball to the boy and retreated towards throwing distance. And he dreamed.

The boy waited patiently for the man to call for the ball, waited an eternity, finally tossing the ball at the man, then sounding a frantic "look out!" The man's reaction was late—the ball slapped the palm of his glove and dropped softly to a solitaire tuft of grass. He shuffled his feet, gazed at the boy. He wanted to say thank you, that and so much more. Instead, he blurted out, "I won't be able to play catch tomorrow."

The boy stared at the man. "Why?"

"Well. . .I don't live around here." The man paused, collected his thoughts, closed the distance to the boy. "I've got to go home. I've been gone too long. I've been visiting a friend."

The boy gazed up to the man's glistening eyes. "Is your friend sick?"

The concern in the boy's voice engulfed the man. He swallowed hard, fighting back once more the overwhelming urge to tell all. "It's difficult to explain. He's not sick, exactly."

"Is your friend okay now?"

"I think he's doing just fine." He looked down to the boy, smiled wistfully. "I know he's going to be just fine."

For a long time the boy said nothing, did nothing. A puffy cloud drifted across the sun. When it passed, the boy squinted to see the man. "Can I call you?"

The man brightened. He approached, glove in hand. "Absolutely. But we can do better than that. There's a Yankee game next week—we'll go." He pulled out a business card and pressed it into the boy's hand. "Got to stay right with your friends." Draping his arm over the boy's shoulder, the man grinned. "Keep both gloves. You never know when someone else might need to play."

Turning from the boy—turning at last towards home—the man stretched out his stride. The second miracle was that when he reached the corner, he slowed his pace and turned to enter the whitewashed church. The boy looked one last time, to wave. Then he hurled the ball further into the sky than ever before, saw it clearly as it descended, danced under it, and caught it firmly in his glove.

Every Corner of the Real Thing

by Mike Hainzinger

"And don't forget to say hi to the baby!"

I promised her I would and turned towards the bus.

"Wait, wait, one more, just one more, pleeease? You and Ray. Closer together. Stand by the gate, but don't cover the plaque!"

It had started yesterday morning in New York City. We were all leaving on the morning coach to Boston. Across the aisle, and older couple, -I would have guessed to be in their mid-sixties-whose conversation just reached earshot, was cramping my snooze. I had been up all night, pacing the station, drinking hot, bouillon-flavored water from the vending machines, the hound's travesty of chicken soup. I was exhausted.

"We'll get the mail, we'll see how far the house has come," the man said.

"The rhubarb, don't forget about the rhubarb."

"Yes, yes. It should be ready by now," he reassured her.

"And we have to move that rug, we have to move it this time. The sun is killing that corner!"

"Maybe we can get George to help us move it, or one of his boys. But nothing's going to move if this bus doesn't first!"

The crescendo of his voice culminated with a swift clap of his hands.

The bus departed and before long we were in Connecticut. The woman broke into an audible whisper:

"Ray." He had fallen asleep. "Raymond." No response. She shook his shoulder. "Ray, honey, look." He opened his eyes and turned to her.

"What is it dear?" he grunted.

They were both whispering now. He was trying to calm her, and at once, they realized I was looking at them.

"Oh, please, forgive us," he said, turning to me. "It's just, well," he pointed towards the front of the bus, "you see this bridge up ahead?"

We both fixed our eyes to the front of the bus.

"Yeah."

"In the spring of '83 the center fell in the middle of the night. Car kept driving over it and dropping one by one into the river." He swallowed, "There just wasn't enough time."

"That's awful." I instinctively rejoined.

"Never heard about it? How old are you?"

"I'm afraid not; twenty in June."

"That's how old-" the woman began to say.

"I know, Helen, I know," as he cut her off.

"I'm Ray, and this is my wife, Helen."

I extended my hand to each of them, smiling as I shook.

"Chris. It's a pleasure."

The conversation took off from there; where I was from, why I was on the bus, was I in college, what I studied, did I have siblings. The usual. But we talked for what seemed to be hours until the exit ramp guided us to Roy Rogers near outside of Yale.

"This is your food stop," the driver spoke into the loud speaker. "You have twenty minutes. I repeat, twenty minutes. If you're not on the coach when I am, thank you for choosing Greyhound." Cliick.... And he was out.

Ray and Helen divided their time between an apartment in New York City and what sounded; like a lovely coastal house in Maine. They were officially leaving New York for the summer, but they would definitely be back for fireworks, Helen promised me. They had no children, were both retired doctors, and loved their garden. But they loved the bus, once in a while anyway.

I walked into the restaurant and made it straight for the bathroom. Abe Lincoln's outhouse was preferable to the one in the rear of the bus. I washed my hands and out my bag down in a booth. I made eye contact with Helen, waved and stepped to the back of the line. Ray began walking in my direction.

"Chris, I was talking to my wife, and we think you'd really enjoy Maine. We weren't sure about you at first. Take no offense, I mean, one just can't be these days. Just how things are, right? But then we talked a while, and I said, Helen, I think this guy's the real thing. So..." He caught his breath.

I kept listening.

"We'd like to extend you the invitation of joining us in Maine for a day or two. Don't feel obliged. If it is any inconvenience to your travel schedule at all, whatsoever, we take no offense—none."

Were these people serious? I decided to play along.

"It...it would be my honor, but....but I don't want to inconvenience you."

"None at all."

"Then I'm your man," I laughed as I gripped his hand. Helen came over. Her husband put his arms around her.

"Dear, we have a houseguest."

"Ooooh, great, great, great!" she said, stamping her left foot. "You'll love Maine, you really will. You can see our new house."

"Now our conversation should arrive in Portland about an hour before your, Chris. Helen and I will pick up the car and meet you back at the station. If we're late, wait for us. We'll be there."

My new friends kept their promise. They were standing to greet me when I walked off the bus after exchanging the niceties, led me to the red Subaru with Maine plates.

"We live in a town a few miles up the coast, but we have to stop for groceries first. You ever had true southern cooking? Helen's the best!"

"No, I haven't," I lied.

The home was an inlet of the ocean, a tiny finger, and fingernail even. While Helen prepared dinner, I sat on a ramshackle wooden bench that may have survived the last world's apocalypse. The sun was setting, I was starving, and I could smell the old stove's exhaustions of smoke behind me. But I wouldn't be rude and go back inside until they called me; I didn't want to seem impatient.

The oak-topped dinning room table stood on a lovely oriental throw rug, which penetrated all corners of the room. Ray dimmed the volume on the Mozart, (or something classical" and lighted two matching candles at the opposite ends of the table.

"Would you care for any wine with your mean, Chris?"

"Please." I never drank wine.

As he poured my glass, I fiddled with the cornbread, trying to loose a corner from the chunk.

"Helen makes real cornbread. No adulterations, she does it like they used to."

"It's how my mother used to make it in Kentucky, nothing but the real thing," Helen added.

"Much healthier, too," her husband added. "There's a lot of real overweight people in rural Maine; nobody really minds their diet."

I was long overdue for a good old-fashioned meal, and I got nothing less. Even rhubarb dessert came straight from the garden.

"Delicious, absolutely delicious," I said several times. And it was.

"We beat the crows," said Helen as she stabbed her plate.

"Where do you plan to go next?" Helen asked.

"Probably west towards Vermont, but it's all up in the air. I don't have any plans."

"Ray, he should visit Cindy and Dan!"

"No, no. Helen, we've already set him off his itinerary enough."

"Who?" I asked.

"Our niece and her husband," said Ray.

"And don't forget about the baby, honey!"

"Yes, my wife would like me to mention that they recently had their first child."

"Where's this?" I asked.

"A small town outside of—"

"Stop dear, he really doesn't need the trouble; you'll give him a guilt trip."

We finished dinner around 9:30; I took my empty plate to the sink and offered to help with the dishes.

"Don't be silly," she whispered, setting down he wine.

"Come on, seriously, you've already done too much. I feel like an imposter."

"Nonsense," said Ray. Helen was motioning towards the floor. "But there is one small thing—"

I listened.

"You see the oriental rung we"

We're sitting on?" I looked down.

"You see, me wife has a bad back, and that corner of it is below the window, and, you see," he pointed, "the sun——"

"Don't even ask, let's do it."

"If, if it would serve as any gesture of appreciation…"

"No problem at all, Ray. Really."

Ray and I moved the table and chairs off of the rug and rotated it. Helen stood with her arms folded across her chest. She took the bird's-eye view as we squatted to align the edges.

"Perfect," Helen said.

"Oh, Chris, this, we've been waiting to do this for a long time," Ray said as he put his hand on my shoulder. He led me to the adjoining room.

"My wife and I would like to invite you to peruse our bookcases over there on the porch," he said, pointing. "Feel free to take what your like,; you can use them more than us."

"Oh, I couldn't; besides I have enough books I still have to catch up on."

"You can never have too much to read, because you can never read too much," he said with a wink.

Despite the fire Ray had lighted, the porch was very chilly. Books lined the shelves from the floor to the ceiling, left to right. I thought only English teachers read these days, fiction at least. But Dickens, Melville, name it, they had it all. An archaic Britannica set lined one self, the Great Books the next. The shelves nearest to the floor abounded with children's books. But there was not much room left in my backpack. I chose a few.

I tugged at a copy of Death Be Not Proud jammed between the two volumes of the unabridged Oxford English Dictionary. Behind it was a yellowed newspaper clipping, laminated and tacked to the rear of the case.

"———Phen Grislach, 20, son of Dr…" The rest was hidden.

"———Idge collapse of last Wednesday claimed—" Again hidden.

"—To rest April 2, 1983." I pinched Volume 2 and tried to free it.

The wood floor began to creak. I quickly slid the paperback to it former position and turned away from the bookshelf.

"Find anything?" Ray asked. The fire crackled from the next room.

"Oh, you know, there's just so much." I said hastily, not looking at him. I could see him in the reflection the light made on the dark window.

"Mis libros, tus libros," he said. He pivoted on his toe and walked away.

"Thank you, Ray," my voice breathed. I couldn't stop staring out the window. I moved closer and pressed my nose to the glass and cupped my hands to shield my eyes from the light's glare. The spruce trees were swaying in the wind, the stars were alive.

A month later I located the street written on the small scrap of paper. Helen's initial had smeared, but was still readable. The house looked little like mine, but had seen more birthdays. The paint was chipping; the address numbers were a mixture of two sets, and a kiddy-pool sat with a hose dangling from its puffy rims. I rang the bell. I could hear footsteps approaching the door. A woman's face glanced from the window. She twisted the knob. The door creaked open; the suction from the storm door caused the screen-door to slam shut on itself. I could hear crying coming from a farther room.

"May I help you?" the young woman asked. She wore a camouflage sundress of green and brown.

"I came to see your baby."

The Expedition

by Steve Wichelecki

After the decimation of the foreign city by air strikes and ground assaults, some hierarchy from the invading country's military, a junta that clad themselves in World War I uniforms decorated with multitudes of symbolic metals, tassels, pins, and ribbons. And ropes declared it germane to tour the devastation. A small group of these elite men had been dispatched to and had arrived in this location. With knees that bent – uncannily high – in an inverted direction, jingling spurs and bubbles escaping intermittently from their ears, these men strutted through dirt street after dirt street of the subjugated city, streets strewn with garbage and gray puddles. The men, at all times, held over-sized magnifying glasses with gilded frames and without lenses in front of their pensive faces.

It was now early evening on the first day of their expedition, and the military officials diligently worked in the rich, intense colors that bled from a dying day.

A few members of this exclusive cadre inspected the bullet-riddled brown walls of surrounding silent buildings that normally resounded with the cacophony of business; reaching one arm through their magnifying glasses, they undulated their index fingers around holes that, by now, were partly filled with government issued dust and ash. Nearby, in the street, some of their counterparts studied burned-out or abandoned automobiles, which were to be found in large quantity and unusual positions. Other officials, standing on a sidewalk, gazed at a pile of dusty debris, which an old man was sitting upon and, with put-stretched arms, vociferating dolorously-one official bent so closely to the wailing man that the men's head nearly infiltrated the threshold of the official's gilded, lens-less magnifying glass, which he held steadily in front of his curious countenance.

Not far off, though a bit further up the street, another such official, bending at the waist with his magnifying glass in front of his face, peered into a burned out enemy military vehicle, a personnel carrier with mounted machine guns, and studied, with fascinated, cold blue eyes, how similar in appearance carbonized newspaper was to carbonized flesh; however, in thicker places of the body, the flesh had a greater semblance, and consistency, to burnt plastic.

In the middle of the littered, disheveled street, approximately twenty feet ahead of the furthest official, sat a hospital bed; it's dirty cream paint chipped and peeling, exhibiting profuse rust. Upon the bed lay a badly burned and bandaged boy; his tan face wore the stupor and apathy of unbearable shock-both his arms had been amputated by a surgeon by the name of Doctor Cruise; Cruise was an unscrupulous, fraudulent, quack of a doctor-he often performed needless, arbitrary, debilitating surgeries that many times ended with death. A woman shroud in black kept vigil over the boy, stroking his straight black hair with a thin, weak hand.

The official studying burnt flesh caught sight of the boy and his benefactor and sauntered over to them; soon after, the rest of the officials, tired of bullet holes and corpses, came to ogle at these living casualties as well; they encircled the boy and his caretaker and, with their magnifying glasses, slowly hovered around the two, paying attention to the black lacerations that ran up and down the boy's torso, exuding purulent discharge.

Suddenly, from around a corner of a large, black, brick building jogged a small convoy of troops, who also served under the discretion of the surveying military official's government.

Although they were impeded by various debris, they were able to jog with consistently straight backs; the convoy passed the boy and his caretaker, though came to a halt not far from them.

This anomaly roused fresh curiosity in the military officials, who were still gathered around the boy; they slowly, silently converged around the convoy, working their way into it, peering with their magnifying glasses, trying to see what their docile soldiers had brought for them; in the middle of this cluster was a stretcher on which laid a broken, livid, bloody-ostensibly from torture-POW; the soldier had just been rescued from an enemy compound.

"Those animals!" sneered an official, "What have they done to you?" His exasperation caused a torrent of bubbles to shoot from his ears; but since there was no breeze, these ephemeral balls of glass only fell to his shoulders and popped.

"Thank you…" said the enervated soldier, wondering why his supervisors held over-sized, lens-less magnifying glasses in front of their faces.

"Don't thank us, thank God," replied one of the officials glibly, warping his leathery face into a smile, exposing black teeth.

Being so weakened by his ordeal, the liberated soldier forgot whom he was talking to; therefore, he became rather indiscreet, asking his supervisors just why they were toting around such crazy things in their hands.

An official, exercising extreme tact, answered: "Because if we didn't, you probably wouldn't want to fight."

Incipient sounds were now heard, coming from around the same corner of the same building where the convoy had emerged a moment earlier. A few seconds later: "A rescued POW! A rescued POW! This way, this way!"- a drove of American television reporters, television-movie producers, journalists and book publishers were galloping toward the cluster of military personnel. Being blinded by various ambitions and zeal, the media blitz found themselves colliding with the maimed boy and his caregiver. Overturning his bed and, subsequently trampling him and the woman. The drove finally, after pushing through the military officials and soldiers, sound themselves amassed around the reclaimed soldier, all clamoring, creating an indecipherable dissonance. The rescued soldier passed out.

To the surprise and delight of everyone, from behind a burnt and sinuous mass of automobiles, buses and tanks, there merged a petulant, yipping chimpanzee, who sported a blue blazer and was followed by a marching band; the chimpanzee waddled down the dirt street while the marching band boomed, "Hail to the Chief." The band trumped through fetid puddles, splashing gray, slimy water on nearby corpse; and the crowd of military personnel stood with their mouths agape, pleased by such an unexpected visit from The chimp.

The chimpanzee, after swatting at a few meandering bubbles, climbed up the arm of one of the soldiers, mounted his head, and leaped from head to head until he got close enough to the soldier on the stretcher that he could jump and alight somewhere upon the man's chest. When finally upon the incapacitated private's chest, the chimpanzee seized and shook the soldier's limp, bloody hand. The chimpanzee then, followed by everyone's gaze, pushed his way out of the crowd, yipping violently all the while; he then continued his progression through the defiled streets.

Poetry

Supplication

by Sarah Vines

Trembling, I ask the question,
Knowing well what it will do,
I am not above his suspicion.
When will this torture be through?

I sit on his lap to ask his thoughts,
Yet, I know in his twisted web,
I will be once again be caught.

All I really want is to hide in a tent,
Like the ones little children make,
So that I may sit and lament
About all of life's sad mistakes.

Or to detach from my physical form
And let my spirit wander free
From all that sadness, anger, and harm.

To be free, oh, what a scary thought.
It's been well over a year now,
Can I ever unlearn what I've been taught?
I need to be independent, but how?

An accusation.
A rebuttal.
A whispered yell.
A screamed murmur.
A cry for help.
A slicing insult.

Still, I stay.
Still, I believe in change.
Still, I love.
Still, I cry in pain.

A supplication for peace,
For hope, for love, for life.
Don't let me fall into the crease
Of despair and strife.

Elegy

by Amber Lamb

Oh, to that time we used to have
I remember. How well we were together,
Like two halves of the bread.
Everything fit so well together
In between us. We were just right.
We functioned so fluently together.

But now I am without you.
And every move I make used to be with you.
I don't know how to glide on my own.
My actions completely out of line.
How will I become adjusted
To this brand new life of mine?

So first I think with you will go
Thoughts and pictures left on the mantle.
A fresh new surface, wiped clean of your residue.
I will try to take my mind back
To however I started without you
And become an older, newer me.

With me you have left a day never strung.
I always knew what would come with
A rising sun, or a dog left barking.
And I always will remember my servant
My servant, which was I. Left everyday
To serve your every need and desire.

But how am I going to understand freedom?
You unmarked me with your departure.
And now I've been blinded so long.
The sun looks as one giant beam of light, fills my vision.
No details, no colors, and no forms I know.
Let out of my womb too soon, as I take my first breath.

Father of Home

by Dane Mentzer

A glow comes down from Heaven
To boast that they're with you
But they don't really realize
That you'll be with me, too.

You were taken home on Chariots of Grace
The price was too great to risk
Your ABBA took you far from this place
I hope you know that you'll be missed.

Your smile lit up all our lives
In ways we can't explain
I can't wait 'til I get Home
To see you in Heaven again.

You were the prettiest angel we've ever had
Much more precious than diamond rings
Now you will fly Home with Dad
This angel's finally got her wings

Now you congregate with the Lord most High
He bends down to give you a kiss
He leans over to you and whispers
"You're much too beautiful for this."

Grandma's Memory

by Kristina Swaagman

Why can't my Grandma remember everything?
To walk into her house and smell cookies
Baking in the oven while she stands at the
Counter slicing bread, remembering to
Cut off the crumbling crusts that I despise.
We would sit down at the table and talk
for hours. My Grandma would laugh and tell jokes.
When I walk into her house now, I am
Greeted by all the good old memories.
The oven bare, the knives put away safely.
As Grandma sits in her chair sewing gently
"Hi, Grandma," I say as the old woman
looks up. In her eyes she is searching for
a name, maybe it's mine or maybe it's hers.
A soft gentle smile comes onto her face
And Grandma responds with a "Oh, hi you."
I smile and say hi, but inside I'm hurt.
Never again will I have my Grandma's ham
Or have her touch or laugh at a joke.
Now I am left with a stranger in my
Grandma's body. It's not fair and I miss
her so much. Just one more time do I want
to go through the door and smell her ham in
the oven and see her cookies on the table.
For one last time, just for one more good day,
Do I want my Grandma to know my name.

Your vision is blurred, staring into paper

by Sean Felix

Your vision is blurred, staring into paper
Spiraling down, being at one with pencil;
Seems that your thoughts are only valid, recorded
What is this need for permanence.
Everything I appreciate is fleeting.
Pump the lungs full of oxygen.
Stretch the limbs through euphoria.
Knowing the pain of life and loving it.
Devour bittersweet nectars of lies if only to absorb them to know them.
Increasing brain mass pulls on the essence.
I reach back through myself and realize why most don't make the effort.
The pain of self awareness stinging the spinal cord.
Always wanting to live these days outside myself.
Some of us are not meant for the density of matter.
The soul whispers all day, the glory of smoke.
Feeling the pale hues of sunset like the softest needles of my conspirators.
Knowing that the rift in the sky is where I need to be
And realizing that most of what I see is screaming at me.
Time collapses and we don't understand.
Peel away our skin we have spent lifetimes bleeding.
You can't trust me because I'm going under
Seems there is a little pain in everything.
Hopefully one day I'll slip away with the rain
exhaling all the things which kept me sane.

Dutiful

by Susan Slaviero

Frightened Child,
Release Mother's hand.
Do not go wild,
Alone.
Just go (Quietly)

Young Lady,
Take the wheel.
It would be a pity
If you could not deal
Responsibly.
Just go (Quietly)

Beloved Daughter,
Wear this dress
Of lace and silken white,
And let it not distress
You.
Just go (Quietly)

Faithful wife,
Sign this form.
You can begin a new life;
And I with my new love, safe and warm.
Please,
Just go (Quietly)

Loyal Worker,
Embrace your platinum years.
You were perfect, silent, stellar-
But no longer needed to turn the gears.
So,
Just go (Quietly)

Aging Body,
Release your grip.
Life is not a party,
Not a trip:
Duty.
Just go (Quietly)

Certifiable

by Kevin E. Orf

You can call me manic,
You can call me what you will.
But don't you try to feed me,
Another Goddamn pill.

So please doctor, won't you help me,
Because I'm breaking down.
I can't stand all these happy people,
With all their fake smiles around.

I'm in for observation,
A thing for which I am concerned.
But when the session's over,
Not a Goddamn thing's been learned.

Now I take a look in the mirror,
"That person looks just like me."
The doctor looks at me smiling,
"Don't you realize you're crazy."

Well that's a well-known fact, don't need any documentation.
I could try to go back and tell you my situation.
But now it's way too late, my mind is too far-gone.
So please remind me to ask you what planet we are one.
Purple elephants and oompa-loompas are running around.
Papa smurf and all the munchkins are out searching the grounds.
Although it is not in sight, they're searching for my mind.
But without it I can still talk, so baby you're just in time.

I'm running around the rubber room,
With scissors in my hand,
Mommy and daddy are watching me,
This isn't the son they planned (for).
I scream, "the virus is airborne,"
As the smoke blows into the room,
It's that f**kin' funny gas to keep my sane,
But when it fades, I will resume…

Look round the bend to stare death in the eye

by Sara DePirro

Look round the bend to stare death in the eye.
They know in their hearts that she will soon die.
They don't give all they can to show they care.
All that they do will not save her. Beware
of the thoughts and the talk around the town.
Emily, a woman whose life wasn't known.
No one had seen her the last twenty years.
When they heard the news, the wonders and fears
had filled the whole town. They wanted to know
about the old woman who years ago
had lived with her father who held high post.
The town often thinks 'bout the girl they lost.
They say that they come to show their concern.
Everyone knows that they've come here to learn
'bout the things Emily's done and the way she lived.
They've told all the stories to friends and kids,
but many don't know what happened was this:
She met a young man and lived in pure bliss.
She loved him and wanted a family soon,
but to her dismay he didn't feel this way too.
She killed him with poison, laid him to rest
In a room in her home, never confessed.

A Saddened Child

by Ryan B. Foster

I Was Young, Yet Saddened At Heart.
A New Fledge Love Which Split Apart.

I Was Alone, Yet Not A Whole.
Abundance Which Created A Hole.

I Was To Blame, Yet It Was Hidden.
Guilt Which Instilled The Burden.

I Was Scared, Yet It Will Never Show.
Fear Which Held Back My Glow.

I Was Changed, Yet Still The Same.
Distortion Where There Is One To Blame.

Full Circle

by Amy Outland

Everything comes full circle.
We struggle to go forward but in the end find ourselves in the same place we began.
The daylight sky turns from cerulean blue to twilight of iridescent purple.
To make our lives better we do what we can.

We struggle to go forward but in the end find ourselves in the same place we began.
Hatred transforms into love.
To make our lives better we do what we can.
Death gives way to life from heaven above.

Hatred transforms into love,
Old women die while their daughters simultaneously give birth.
Death gives way to life from heaven above,
Flowers grow only to return to the rich, soft earth.

Old women die while their daughters simultaneously give birth.
Recent wounds bleed as past ones begin to heal.
Flowers grow only to return to the rich, soft earth.
Dreams fade and no longer disguise what is real.

Recent wounds bleed as past ones begin to heal.
Emotions unbidden seep into an unsuspecting heart.
Dreams fade and no longer disguise what is real.
All things once held together, always break apart.

Emotions unbidden seep into an unsuspecting heart.
Silence can be broken.
All things once held together always break apart.
Truth cleanses the filth left by lies too proudly spoken.

Silence can be broken.
Written words can be erased, leaving behind an empty page
Truth cleanses the filth left by lies too proudly spoken.
Pain is obliterated and replaced by rage.

The daylight sky turns from cerulean blue to twilight of iridescent purple
Written words can be erased, leaving behind an empty page
Pain is obliterated and replaced by rage.
Everything comes full circle.

Lines

by Zyndram Para

Lines are warm, lines are good,
Stay in; don't move even if you could;
Never better never quarrel,
Follow your lines straight to hell.

All have a line,
A line that they must follow
For the good of all
Or they are doomed to the dark bellow.

Point out and ban
Those, which defy,
We all must follow lines,
It is our duty, do not ask why.

In the Face of Challenge

by Linda Campbell

So here I am, must be back in the womb,
Fighting for space and feeling darkness loom.
Full of self doubt, not sure where I'm going,
Grasping at faith, Spirit's guidance to knowing.
Just why my dreams must be put aside again,
For other's needs and the weakness of men.
I've fought battles within and without,
No longer am I confused or in doubt.
My legacy shall be more than toil and pain,
But poesy echoing life's splendor again.
Not by chance or luck, I'll make myself heard,
But employ vision to creative word.
Ready to journey this path so strange,
And explore the challenge, enjoy the change.
The voice within is all I need hear,
Clarity abounds, my purpose is clear.

I gave, you took

by Keith Gay

We were great weren't we?

Worked quite well up until

Now, we sit staring dumbly

At one another, asking without speaking

Why the waterbed is leaking

And your tired legs are creaking

As the spread, tour valley peaking

Breathing a vapid violet brook.

Then suddenly the question shook

Begging not why but why it took

So long for me to see

Why you were so fond of me

It seems your philosophy

Fit mine like lock and key

I gave; you took

I gave praise, you accepted

I gave gifts, you obliged

I gave time; you did not steal, merely kept me from wasting.

I gave laughter; you wrapped it up in boxes.

I gave joy; you hoarded it like a miser.

I gave smiles; you snatched them away.

I look at you now

Counting my losses in the dark strand of your hair

Praise

Gifts

Love

Time

Laughter

Joy

Smiles

Gone

I feel, in the aching void you left in my heart,

Awkward by the fire behind your eyes,

That old question burning, turning into rage:

Why?

If I Ever Get the Chance

by Jennifer Klingelhofer-Scholes

If I ever get the chance
I want to go to Rome
And travel through France
And never go back home

If I ever get the chance
I want to go rock climbing
And learn how to dance
And maybe take up sky diving

If I ever get the chance
I'm going to ask him out
Give one more try to romance
And not worry about the fallout

Just some of the things I'll do so then
I won't be wishing I had it to do all over again
Metamorphosis

Alas, the sun and moon depart
Leaving what we have counted loss
The wounds and the bloodied knives
That we have eagerly pushed aside
Up from the earth our pasts' arise
Bringing with them their battered worth
The worms and death have had their way
Leaving behind a tattered corpse
A being of unseen beauty appears
Rending our hearts and opening our eyes
Slowly taking all my withered clothes
And molding them into majestic splendor.

The Mirror

by Shamill
Darrell Smith

The mirror has good posture, I do indeed declare,
The mirror always has posture, since it makes me stare.
Over, Over again it stays the same,
Remind of garments embroidered with a stain.
Amazing smooth curves, straight lines and a pose,
As a matter it resembles my hair, teeth and my nose.
Am I being watched and observed clearly,
Watch. . .day to week to month to month to yearly.
Eat from my plate and foment an illusion,
Mind, body and soul a fusion no confusion.
The mirror is very interesting so beware,
The mirror has good posture, so you indeed declare.

Painting in the Sky

by Rob Geiger

The horizon burns with the fire of morning,
Our bright star waking from slumber.
Orange colors the sky.

The sunrise fades into the back of our mind
As clouds roll in to erase the dawn.
Gray spills out onto the canvas.

Thunder rumbles the backdrop,
Erratic lines of light fill the scene.
Deep blue runs down the portrait.

Rain falls from heaven in thick sheets,
Drenching the art in a fine shade.
Splashed colors of gray and blue.

The clouds part at the days end,
Showing the true colors of sunset.
Orange, once again, colors the sky.

Light descends into night,
A thousand white specs fill the dark.
White dots illuminate the black,
Depicting the night sky.

My Box

by Priscilla Wells

This box is getting smaller; these walls are caving in

This box is getting smaller; these winds feel a little colder

This box is getting smaller; I feel so alone

This box is getting smaller; these drops on my face aren't from the clouds

This box is getting smaller; these wounds have no time to heal

This box is getting smaller; these people feast on me

This box is getting smaller; these rays never shine on me

This box is getting smaller; this love is getting expensive

This box is getting smaller; my breath is getting shorter

This box is getting bigger; the walls are spreading out

This box is getting bigger; that breeze caressed my face

This box is getting bigger; there you are

This box is getting bigger; these drops are God's

This box is getting bigger; time is letting me heal

This box is getting bigger; I'm not devoured

This box is getting bigger; these rays warm my skin

This box is getting bigger; your love is free

This box is getting bigger; I've got so much air

This box is bigger because of you.

This box isn't a box anymore; it's my life; it's you!

My Old Friend

by Ryan B. Foster

You know it is hard to find the right words.
So sharp on my tongue like the edge of a sword.
But I can not help myself not to say.
That I fear that approaching day.
I know that it will be the end.
And I do not want to say goodbye, my old friend.
I try not to think of that day that you will die.
Because it almost makes me tear up and cry.
It is hard not to, when I look deep into your eyes.
Knowing that you will pass and no longer be alive.
So I think of the time when I was a child.
Each and every day you made me smile.
But life has flew by like one big hurry.
For that I have to say that I'm sorry.
Because I would love to have another day.
Just so that we could run and play.
Yet today has come an I said goodbye.
And of all times I think I just might cry.

Unpopular

by Kim Anderson

Look at the ugly caterpillar.
Look at it on the ground.
Look at how ugly.
Look at them all around.

Hear the caterpillar speak.
Hear it make not a sound.
Hear the others loud.
Here the caterpillar can't be found.

Feel the coarse hair.
Feel the caterpillar legs.
Feel and make new.
Feel makes it hide (in a cocoon).

See it alone in a tree.
See it plain.
See it old.
See it for all to disdain.

Look at it coming through.
Hear it spread its wings.
Feel the beauty in growth.
See the butterfly in you (in all).

Haiku

Collected by Barb Klasing
in her English 102

Fish
Jumping out of the water
Smiling at their reflection

~Allen Vires

Trees
Waving bare branches
Naked in the Winter Snow
Covered Until Spring

~Molly Chase

Black Ice
frozen water patch:
mirrors soft sunlight above,
trips careless creatures

(murky gutter swamp
unmoving life force stares up
uncaring sky stops)

~Rebecca Guerra

Coyote
cryer of night
waiting, watching
hiding shadow
hunter (cat snatcher)

~Stephanie Dally

Wind
Fierce Gusts
Blowing, Shoving, Pushing
All Against Me No Hope
Calming, Gliding, Flowing
Gentle Breeze

~ Stacy Buehler

Snow
frozen, bitter
falling, covering, chilling
New life is struggling
warming, melting
spring
~Lindsey Stanton

Love
happiness, heartbreak,pain
an endless search.
~Ivan Bonkalski

River and waterfalls
Crystalline singers
Of beautiful melodies
Full of life.

Flowers
Beautiful princesses
In a great rug
Giant rainbow
Sea of colors painted of sun.
~Servando Dorantes

Wolf
Lone hunter
stalking, hunting, chasing
hunting the prey
victory.
~Eric Korczak

Shadows
Hiding in the forest
Waiting for nightfall
~Allen Vires

Call for Submissions!

The Wordeater publishes biannually, prior to the close of Spring and Fall semesters. While a deadline for each issue is established during the semester, the Wordeater will continuously accept submissions for future issues. Please keep the following guidelines in mind:

All submissions are judged anonymously.

All work must be word-processed or typed.

Emailed submissions should be attached as Word documents.

All work must be original and unpublished.

All work should be proofread for typographical mistakes.

Original photography and artwork must be reproducible in black and white.

The subject matter and language of work submitted should be appropriate for the Joliet Junior College community.

Please include a cover sheet (with your name, address, and phone number, as well as the titles of your pieces) with the work you submit. Please identify yourself as a current or former student or a present or former faculty or staff member.

If you include a self-addressed stamped envelope with your submission, you will receive word on whether the work you submitted has been accepted or rejected. Revised work can be resubmitted for consideration for future issues.

Please save a copy of the work yousubmit. Submissions (except for original artwork) will not be returned.

Editorial changes may be made for readability.

Send Submissions to

wordeater@jjc.edu

or

Wordeater
c/o Stacey V. Murphy
English / Foreign Languages
Joliet Junior College
1215 Houbolt Road
Joliet, IL 60431

Wordeater #112

Wordeater is the biannual literary / arts magazine of Joliet Junior College. It accepts submissions from current and former students and faculty. It is looking for original creative work of any kind, including poetry, plays, short fiction, translations, personal or literary essays, interviews, autobiographical prose, photography, and art. Please submit work to wordeater@jjc.edu or to S. Murphy, English / Foreign Languages Dept., C-1070

Editorial Board*

Margaret Boehle
Lonny Harper
Jessica Perez
Jeremy Neander
Susan Slaviero
Amanda Stofko

Editorial Assistants

Margaret Boehle
Jessica Perez
Susan Slaviero
Therese Panzica

Faculty Advisor

Stacey V. Murphy

Poetry Awards

The John Stobart Award for Poetry was established in honor of the founder and guiding light of Wordeater, John Stobart. As faculty sponsor, he shepherded it through 106 issues. He retired from JJC's English/ Foreign Languages Department in 1999.

Certifiable
by Kevin E. Orf

Supplication
by Sarah Vines

Short Fiction Awards

Shoelaces
by Jacob A. Boyd

Megan
by Diana Weathersby

Cover Art

Paul Stephenson

*An editorial board, composed each semester, reviews the submissions to make determinations on what will be published in that semester's issue. If you are interested in becoming a member of the editorial board, or in becoming an editorial assistant, please send a letter of interest to wordeater@jjc.edu.

©2004 Paul Stephenson